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ABSTRACT

this paper uses an interdisciplinary research methodology to engage the resources provided by the humanities and the liberal arts in a discourse analysis of Unitarian Universalism. The paper describes Unitarian Universalism as a contemporary religious-rhetorical movement and distinctive persuasion which nurtures an evolving, enriching religious perspective that addresses humanity's existential experience, encourages strong interpersonal relationships, and requires effective communication. Following an introduction, the paper is in 14 sections: (1) Unitarian Universalism as a Contemporary Religious-Rhetorical Movement; (2) The Free Church in a Changing World; (3) Review of Research; (4) Values Inventory; (5) Churches and Fellowships as Institutions; (6) Preaching; (7) Language and Communication; (8) Communicative Symbols; (9) Sacraments as Communicative Acts; (10) Prayer as Communication; (11) Worship as Communication; (12) Music as Communication; (13) Mass Media Communication; and (14) Conclusions. The paper concludes that Unitarian Universalism describes genuine religion as a qualitative dimension pervading human experience and existence that requires symbolic expression; recognizes that religious response requires symbolization although differences characterize the poetic-emotive language and the objective-scientific language; and demonstrates that instrumental music and the performing arts provide additional languages that enrich religious communication and celebration. Ninety-eight notes are included. (SR)

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UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM AS A MOVEMENT

Daniel Ross Chandler

Introduction

The historic 1960s and early 70s were characterized with a provocative rhetorical-communicative phenomena.

From dramatic boycotts paralyzing Montgomery and Birmingham where Blacks asserted civil rights demands; from student-occupied university administration buildings from Berkeley to Cambridge where dissidents denounced United States military involvement in Southeast Asia; from chanting, banner-bearing protester filling San Francisco's Castro Street and New York's Greenwich Village emerged a distinctive rhetorical behavior.

As rhetorical-communication scholars analyzed this discourse, an inter-disciplinary methodology was employed that engaged the rich resources provided by the humanities and liberal arts. With an extended perspective, students recognized that communication transpires within a complex and complicated cultural context that Bitzer described as a "rhetorical situation."[2] Understanding communication within an enlarged context was facilitated with a diagram that MCBurney had developed; McBurney indicated the theoretical relationships between values, political systems, epistemologies, behavior, approaches for a speaker, and the outcome.[3] Baird explained that rhetoric does not function as an isolated and independent discipline, but utilizes philosophy, logic, psychology, ethics, political science, literature, language, science, and metaphysics.[4] Within this scholarly tradition, students developed studies about movements and campaigns.

A rhetorical movement was described as a collective action exerted by numerous persons who possess minimal formal and informal organization, employ communication networks connecting small groups of people who share common convictions, and who act cooperatively to pursue some common purpose.[5]

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Most collectives appear motivated with pervasive psychological frustration or deprivation, function primarily outside the institutionalized decision-making process, exert resistance against significant social norms, and attempt to change the beliefs or behavior of a larger society. A collective generally has a potentially expanding membership who can be reached through communication and attracted to the movement's purpose or objectives. These strategies can be executed deliberately and devised pragmatically through effective persuasion.

Sometimes students classified rhetorical movements according to their purposes. A revolutionary movement attempts sweeping social change in ideology or institutions; a reformist movement attempts minor adjustments; while a reactionary movement seeks to prevent or postpone changes or to reverse trends or recapture lost goals.

Rhetorical movements usually develop within a "rhetorical situation" when coagulated collectives respond purposefully to an experienced difficulty and attempt an elimination or reduction of these problematic exigencies. Rhetorical actions are designed and executed to replace sterile images or inadequate symbols through persuasive communication designed to reach the movement's members, the uncommitted who are potential members, the authorities who are capable of making changes, and an opposition public who resists the proposed change.

Stemming from Kenneth Burke's writings, dramatistic pentads were developed that modified a complex composed of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose.[6] Balthrop constructed a viable scheme for examining rhetorical-communicative movements by describing them as collective actions directed toward achieving social change, enduring through time, arising from dissatisfaction with the present or some hope about the future, and composed with a voluntary membership united by a common ideology.[7] Balthrop explained how a source of strain produces dissatisfaction and an ideology provides terms that promote identification and create alternative hierarchies. The collective nature

that characterizes a movement is derived from a membership who exert their efforts. The organization structures the relationships which develop between the leader, members, and the non-movement groups. Agents of social control exert their influence upon the actions that are initiated.

Drawing upon an extensive published literature, this writer constructed and published an alternative dramatistic pentad consisting of a communicator's profile and purpose, and the communication context, content, consequences, strategies, signs and symbols, vehicles, and values.[8]

The purpose prompting this paper is to present another pentad by describing Unitarian Universalism as a contemporary religious-rhetorical movement.

[1]Ernest J. Wrage, "Public Address: A Study in Social and Intellectual History," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 38 (December, 1947), pp. 451-457. See Ernest J. Wrage and Barnet Baskerville, American Forum (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960) and their Contemporary Forum (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962).

[2]Lloyd F. Bitzer, The Rhetorical Situation," in Contemporary Rhetoric ed. Douglas Ehninger (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1972), pp. 39-49.

[3]James H. McBurney, "The Role of Discussion and Debate," The Gavel 30 (May, 1948), p. 65. See Michael C. McGee, "In Search of 'The People': A Rhetorical Alternative," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 61 (October, 1975), p. 235.

[4]A. Craig Baird, Rhetoric: A Philosophical Inquiry (New York: The Ronald Press, 1965), p. 18. See Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black, eds. The Prospect of Rhetoric (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

[5]Several books are helpful: Barry McLaughlin, Studies in Social Movements (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973); Anthony Oberschall, Social Conflict and Social Movements (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973); and Paul Wilkinson, Social Movements (New York: Praeger, 1971).

[6]See especially Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) and his A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

[7]Bill Balthrop, "The Representative Anecdote: An Approach To Movement Study," an unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Houston, 1975.

[8]Daniel Ross Chandler, The Rhetorical Tradition (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1978). See Leland Griffin, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 38 (December, 1947), pp. 184-188. Additional articles include: Robert S. Cathcart, "New Approaches to the Study of Movements: Defining Movements Rhetorically," Western Speech 36 (Spring, 1972), pp 82-88; Dan F. Hahn and Ruth M. Conchar, "Studying Social Movements: A Rhetorical Methodology," The Speech Teacher 20 (January, 1971), pp. 44-52; Herbert W. Simons, "Persuasion in Social Conflicts: A Critique of Prevailing Conceptions and a Framework for Future Research," Speech Monographs 39 (1972), pp. 227-247; and Ralph R. Smith and Russel R. Windes, "The Innovational Movement: A Rhetorical Theory," The Quarterly Journal of Speech 61 (April, 1975), pp. 140-153. A current summation is Suzanne Volmer Riches and Malcolm O. Sillars, "The Status of Movement Criticism," The Western Journal of Speech Communication 44 (1980), p. 283.

Recommended is Paul H. Boase, ed. The Rhetoric of Protest and Reform, 1878-1898 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980).

Unitarian Universalism as a Contemporary Religious-Rhetorical Movement

Clergyman Earl Holt questioned his fellow Unitarian Universalists: "Do we want to be a significant religious alternative, or do we want to be an alternative to religion?"[1] Numerous critics describe the movement as emerging on the frontiers of contemporary social and religious thought, serving as a challenge to historic religion, but remaining an estranged ivory-tower persuasion attracting a miniscule membership and remaining an inconsequencial minority.[2]

Holt's provocative inquiry prompts thoughtful observers to discern what is distinctively religious about contemporary Unitarian Universalism.

Minister Meserve mentioned in 1977 that among the approximately 200,000 members are theists describing God as person, deists regarding God as a master mechanic, humanists respecting the human potential, agnostics concluding that one can not know, atheists affirming there is no God, and pantheists who believe that, "God is that totality of things and thoughts and insights that includes all creation and holds us together with nature, with all living things, and even with other worlds and universes."[3] Such diversity evidences an evident pluralism without an inevitable consensus, and might seem an inconsistency or contradiction unless one assumes, in clergyman Brigham's expression, that "Genuine faith is a state of mind, and is not a statement of a creed."[4]

As a contemporary religious-rhetorical movement, Unitarian Universalism stems from an historic tradition that includes Moses' pronouncements about moral

Socrates searching for philosophical truth, and Jesus affirmations about agape, although the modern movement frequently is dated with the burning of Michael Servetus in John Calvin's Bible-based Geneva.[5] Unitarian Universalism implies a distinctive mentality, employs a specific methodology, and constitutes a characteristic message. Howlett explained:

> Those who follow the critical way in religion begin, not with a revelation from on high, but with human experience....We begin, not with obligations laid upon us by a church, but with the obligations we recognize as falling upon us because we first claim them from others in their actions toward us. The beliefs of the critical mind rise not out of a Holy Book or a sanctified creed, but out of the sense of right and truth that rises within us, but then, only when that sense of right and truth has been tested against the sense of right and truth that rises in our fellow-humans everywhere....
>
> The critical way in religion is a way of being religious while taking the problem of human error into account. 6

Mellowing the sustained criticism that Unitarian Universalism permits anyone to avow anything, theologian James Luther Adams identified several principles undergirding that persuasion. These principles are that revelation is continuous, interpersonal relationships should be established through consent rather than coercion, moral responsibility requires directing one's efforts toward establishing a just and loving community, the decisive forms given goodness in society are institutional forms, and the available resources for achieving meaningful social change justifies an ultimate optimism.[7] Minister Marshall maintained that modern Unitarian Universalism is predicated upon the conclusions that religious experience constitutes a germane and essential part of the human psyche, that contemporary persons are witnessing a collapsing unitary cosmology and watching another emerging, and that liberal religious philosophy is preeminently capable of formulating and articulating a relevent religious perspective:

> Universally, humanity seeks relationships with that which is outside the self. It might be the starry heavens above, some other life, the mystic music of the spheres; it might be family, tribe, clan, class, nation, race or species; but there is always such a reaching out for mutual support or aid, sharing and giving. There is a sense of oneness, of belonging, of being part of a larger whole, and this influences one's life, one's activities, one's horizons. 8

Prophetically Marshall concluded that whatever final form the emerging perspective assumes, nevertheless several characteristics will endure:

> ...freedom for the individual; openness to new ideas; universality that is inclusive of the whole human family, male and female, East and West, black, red, brown, yellow and white. It will enshrine the pioneers, the liberators, the freedom fighters, the men and women of non-violence, and the thinkers and intellectuals who were not afraid to express new ideas and contrary views, ot to pose the challenges to the future while condemning the prejudices of the past. 9

Some who study this optimistic, non-creedal, universal humanism maintain that this emergent persuasion and contemporary perspective will cherish individual freedom, appropriate time-tested religious traditions for spiritual guidance, nurture rediscovering values within historic religious ideas and images, recognize the differences between analytical-descriptive language and interpretative-appreciative language, and encourage openness towards mythology, metaphor, and symbols.[10]

Endnotes

[1]See "Earl Holt's Question: A Kairos Sympouism on the Future of Faith," Kairos XXVI (Spring, 1982), pp. 7-10.

[2]David E. Christensen, "Ivory-Tower Religion? Religion of the Future?," Religious Humanism XVIII (2) (Spring, 1984), pp. 74-81.

[3]Harry C. Meserve, "A Unitarian Universalist Dialogue," Church of the Larger Fellowship News Bulletin XXXIII (1) (September, 1977), p. 3.

[4]John W. Brigham, "Affirmations of a Liberal Faith," Church of the Larger Fellowship News Bulletin XXXVII (2) (October, 1981), p. 3.

[5]Rhys Williams, "Unitarian Universalism," Church of the Larger Fellowship News Bulletin XXXVI (1) (September, 1980), p. 3

[6]Duncan Howlett, "The Critical Way In Religion - What It Is and What It Is Not," Church of the Larger Fellowship News Bulletin XXXVII (4) (January, 1981), p. 5.

[7]James Luther Adams, On Being Human - Religiously ed. Max Stackhouse (Boston: Beacon Press, 19).

[8]George N. Marshall, "What Future For Liberal Religion?" Church of the Larger Fellowship News Bulletin XL (9) (May, 1984), p. 5.

[9]Marshall, "What Future For Liberal Religion?," p. 6.

[10]See Donald Szantho Harrington, "What Is The New Liberalism in Religion?," a sermon preached at the Community Church of New York, New York City, March 2, 1980.

As an historical movement, Unitarian Universalism draws adherents who would reform traditional religious beliefs and organizations, some adventurers who would break decisively with religious traditions and construct new perspectives, and some advocates who would seek new insights from emerging knowledge. As Marshall recognized:

> Our movement from its inception has sought to be more than a sectarian church....Indeed, it was Channing's hope and that of many other religious liberals of his time that it would not be necessary to form a new church, a new denomination.
>
> They hoped to influence existing churches by reason, so that all religions would remove the barriers raised by their creeds and receive into fellowship all who sought the good life. 1

Religious liberals during Channing's generation, like contemporary Unitarian Universalists, discovered that "religions must grow beyond their ancient, narrow differences and recognize the common, universal foundation that underlies them all."[2] As a distinctive religious persuasion and specific movement, contemporary Unitarian Universalism encompasses at least three philosophical traditions. As Mendelsohn explained:

> We find ourselves, then, possessors of a tradition with these three interwoven strands: a Biblically-centered faith subject to the authority of Reason; a Romantic or Transcendentalist faith which couples warm, intuitional spirituality with strong rational, ethical and moral emphases; and a faith rooted in naturalistic scientific empiricism....
>
> The basic principles to which all three appeal are unrestricted freedom of inquiry in religious thought and opinion, unrestricted freedom of self-government as congregations or religious communities, and unrestricted freedom from authoritative tests as to what constitutes genuine Unitarianism. 3

Their relationship to human historical development becomes secondary for numerous Unitarians who emphasize their existential relationships and celebrate human existence in the here-and-now. A denominational pamphlet explains:

> Our attitude toward tradition is neither to embrace it completely nor to reject it completely. We wish to keep whatever in the past is valid, while letting go whatever is not....
>
> Our genius lies, not in a particular break with a particular tradition, but in a constant willingness to break with whatever elements of tradition threaten to bind us. Whenever our practice ceases to reflect the highest aims we can imagine and seek to serve, whenever our worship is of something less than what we conceive to be the Most High, we are compelled to make a break with the past through gradual reform, if possible but if not, by revolt - even by the formation of a new church. 4

An outside observer recognized a specific purpose prompting Unitarian Universalism; Taylor maintained:

> Among the denominations, the role of the liberal church is to act at the front edge of the intellectual, spiritual and social change in the American religious community and deliberately to engage itself with the elements and forces of contemporary society at the places where these are to be found at their highest tension. 5

[1]George N. Marshall, Unitarians and Universalists Believe (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1967), p. 4. See Marshall's The Challenge of a Liberal Faith (New York: Pyramid House, 1966).

[2]Waldemar Argow, Unitarian Universalism: Some Questions Answered (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1967), p. 14. Two books by Argow are helpful: What Do Religious Liberals Believe? (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1950); and The Case for Liberal Religion (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1954).

[3]Jack Mendelsohn, "The Liberal Religious Gospel Revisited," a sermon preached at the First Unitarian Church of Chicago, March 25, 1973, p. 3.

[4]Unitarian Universalist Association, The Free Church (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1965), pp. 1-2.

[5]Harold Taylor, An Outsider Appraises Us (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1966), p. 1.

Unitarian Universalists seem unique among American religious believers partly because they emphasize discovering sources of meaning and purpose, rather than transmitting revealed truths. An affirmation about man as a rational creature living joyfully undergirds their persistent quest, liberated from traditional theological encumberances. Marshall explained:

> Unitarians and Universalists reject the doctrine of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the belief in supernatural Miracles, the concept of election as the means of salvation, the concept of Hell as a place to which the dead go to be punished, and, of course, the concept of Purgatory....
>
> Unitarians and Universalists, let it be said clearly, have given up the necessity to accept orthodox beliefs in Revelation, Miracles, Immaculate Conception, Bodily Resurrection, and Salvation, but we have not given up believing. 1

The Unitarian Universalist pilgrimage to fanthom deeper understanding seems predicated upon the propositions that man constitutes "a rational being, who possesses the power to respond intelligently to the forces that surround him"[2] and that human happiness is the highest good. Olson stated the common conviction that these spirited religious liberals seek a living faith that can be applied pragmatically and developed experiencially:

> Not one of the values which we affirm as a part of our faith is more than a fantasy unless the conviction behind it is committed to life. But when this faith is given its rightful place in our daily lives, it brings to us and to all mankind a sense of kinship and of solidarity which is the purpose and goal of universal religion.3

Numerous contemporary Unitarian Universalists concur with Holland:

> We know that the kind of world we seek will not appear miraculously while we dream of pie in the sky and avow this world is not our home, that we are just passing through....We would prefer to remain on the narrow ridge of understanding than to take the leap into pleasant illusions. 4

Living abundantly within a present-day world requires developing a relevant religious philosophy in which distortions and corruptions are abandoned. During a decade when abortion, artificial insemination, open marriage, and alternative life-styles have become unavoidable concerns, antiquated notions become impediments and obstacles to creative living. As Taylor said:

> Early Christianity's absurd and obscene allegians to the twin demi-gods of celibacy and chastity inaugurated such an unhealthy relationship between religion and man's sexual nature that it deformed his understanding of moral responsibility. 5

New information and increasing information are essential sources in developing a contemporary religious perspective for enriching and enhancing human existence.

The Free Church in a Changing World

Understanding epistemic assumptions is essential in appreciating Unitarian Universalism. One critical difference is that, while orthodox Christians believe that God is revealed through Jesus Christ and that the required response is proclamation of the Word and baptism as a sign of conversion, these religious liberals embrace no single, finalized persuasion but seek an evolving comprehension about Ultimate Reality through unrestrained intellectual inquiry and humankind's growing knowledge and increasing experience. While Catholics accept the church and Protestants acknowledge the Bible as sources of ultimate authority in theological speculation, Unitarian Universalists attempt to discover the nature of Ultimate Reality and to live harmoniously with that Reality.

Considering religion as a means for understanding that Reality, some maintain that myth, symbols, and rituals represent important but inevitably inadequate

attempts to conceptualize a reality that persistently evades comprehension. "Religion is man's view of ultimate reality," Andrew Greeley concluded, "a view learned in community and generating community, a view which demands the involvement of the whole man and thus embodies itself in myth and produces, in some form or other, a sense of the numinous or the transcendent."[6] Experiencing Ultimate Reality provokes an inevitable, complete response. Religion, therefore, remains inherently epistemic because essential affirmations about reality are asserted.

Recognizing accurately that Unitarian Universalists are witnessing "the breakdown of corporate belief and process,"[7] countless contemporary liberals refuse to compose creeds; however numerous adherents want a statement suggesting or summarizing creditable affirmations. Halverson admonished his fellow Unitarian Universalists that "we will be remembered as religious people by the meanings we fuse into peoples lives, that helped them find order in their feelings, clarity in their religious thinking, holy times of remembrance, and the dignity of human response to need."[8] Clergyman Clark contended:

> The hallmark of a religion is not whether it is Biblical but whether it responds to the hunger for meaning and value, has a cultus for reinforcing its myths so that believers live by them, and provides an ethic by which to guide personal behavior....
>
> A radical epistemological shift from revelation to reason has made all the difference....Epistemology, more than specific doctrine, separates the orthodox sheep from the Unitarian Universalist goats....
>
> The transformation from revelation to reason made it possible for our tradition, with no stress, to make a second radical shift from the theory of original creation to the theory of evolution, as explained by Unitarian Charles Darwin in 1859, transmuting the source of creativity from the supernatural to the natural. 9

Twentieth-century scientific progress and increasing knowledge from Biblical and humanistic studies simply require that obsolete notions be eliminated.

[1]George N. Marshall, Unitarians and Universalists Believe (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1967), pp. 2-6.

[2]Philip R. Giles, The Liberal Way In Religion (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1967), p. 3.

[3]Carl H. Olson, An Understanding of Unitarian Universalism (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1965), p. 16.

[4]Manuel R. Holland, Salvation From What? (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1966), p. 2.

[5]John A. Taylor, Birth Control (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1966), p. 1. See John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[6]Andrew W. Greeley, Unsecular Man (New York: A Delta Book of Dell Publishing Company, 1972), p. 173.

[7]Ralph Norman Halverson, "What's Religious in Unitarian Universalism?," a paper published by Unitarian Universalist Advance, Garden City, New York, February, 1976, p. 3.

[8]Halverson, "What's Religious in Unitarian Universalism?," p. 10.

[9]John Ruskin Clark, "What's Religious in Unitarian Universalism?," a paper published by Unitarian Universalist Advance, Garden City, New York, 1975-6, pp. 4-7.

Review of Research

Two research projects present information that is immeasurable helpful in identifying and describing Unitarian Universalists as a specific constituency.

A 1966 national survey of Unitarian Universalists conducted by the Unitarian Universalist Association utilized completed questionnaires from a representative sample containing 12,146 members from eightly local churches affiliated with the movement and located in the United States and Canada. These findings reveal that in 1966, less than one-tenth of one percent of the United States population was Unitarian Universalist, that less than one-twentieth of one percent of the Canadian population wan Unitarian Universalist, and that nearly ninety percent of the members are converts from other denominations.[a] Fifty-eight percent of the Unitarian Universilists who participated identified themselves as non-Christian, fifty-nine percent did not identify their local congregation as Christian, and fifty-six percent did not feel that others in their communities regarded the congregation as Christian.[b]

Information from this continental survey was released as a report from the Goals Committee. Released in 1967, the report indicated that sixty-two percent of the respondents earned more than $10,000 annually, that sixty percent held college degrees while twenty-five percent had graduate degrees, and that sixty percent were employed in the professions.[c] Apprehensive about a class consciousness that appears inconsistent with social equality and inclusiveness, a Committee on Liberal Religious Thought and Dialogue asserted that "Unitarian Universalist churches have in fact engendered a class-oriented denomination."[d] Unitarian Universalists were encouraged to make haste in rejoining the remainder of humankind.

Another important investigation resulted in a 1979 Media Feasibility Study Committee report that summarized an attempt "to identify and recommend media resources that will promote denominational growth, liberal religious values and a positive UU self-image, and that are feasible for use by the Unitarian Universalist Association, its affiliates and its local societies."[e] A comprehensive study attempted to describe Unitarian Universalists demographically, psychographically, and religiously. The questionnaire contained questiona about affiliation, membership, involvement, evaluation, beliefs, and media habits. The 1967 Report of the Committee on Goals contained several questions that were repeated during the 1979 survey. North American Unitarian Universalists whose names appeared on the denominational newspaper's mailing list, which is the only roster listing Unitarian Universalists, was used. The survey distinguished between two specific groups: members who has joined a society two years earlier or less were designated as new members, and their responses were compared with responses from older members. The total number used in a representative sample was 98 new members and 290 composite.[f]

Among the findings were that thirty-nine percent of all and forty-five percent of the new members reside in communities having populations that total half a million or more; seventy-five percent of all and six y-three percent of the new are employed in high-level executive, large-concern business, or high-income professional groups; twenty-six percent of all and sixteen percent of the new hold masters degrees while eight percent of all and four percent of the new have earned doctorates; and forty-four percent of all and forty-one percent of the new identify politically with the Democrat Party while thirty-seven percent

of all and forty-six percent of the new describe themselves as politically independent.

Citing the aspects of their religious societies that they regard as best, twenty-eight percent of all and thirty-eight percent of the new identified the minister. Other high-scoring aspects were friendliness of the society; quality of people; and group or interpersonal relationships. Twenty-three percent of the new and twelve percent of all mentioned intellectual stimulation. When asked which area was least important, twenty-three percent of all and eighteen percent of the new replied social action.

Seventy-four percent of all, eighty-three percent of the new, and seventy-seven percent surveyed in 1967 overwhelmingly indicated that joining the denomination supported or clarified their previous value-system. Two reasons for remaining Unitarian Universalists were mentioned frequently by all who participated in the media study: freedom of belief (forty-two percent) and fellowship of like minds (forty-one percent). Among the new members, reasons given for remaining Unitarian Universilists were fellowship of like minds (forty-four percent) and freedom of belief (forty percent). Seventy-four percent of all and eighty-one percent of the new indicated an anticipation of staying with their societies. An average length of membership in a Unitarian Universalist society is 12.5 years for all Unitarian Universalists; and half of all Unitarian Universalists are members of the first society that they joined. Among the composite group was indicated a desire to emphasize the spiritual more and the intellectual aspects less; to present Unitarian Universalism as a religion; and to stress Protestant roots.

Although individual intellectual freedom remains a distinctive characteristic for Unitarian Universalism, belief and non-belief in a divinity constitutes a divided opinion. In the 1979 media survey, forty-three percent of all and thirty-seven percent of the new indicated that "God" might be appropriately "used as a name for some natural process within the universe, such as love or creative evolution."[g] Thirty-three percent of all and thirty-nine percent of the new consider "God" as "basis of all being, real but not adequately describable."[h]

[a]Robert B. Tapp, Religion Among The Unitarian Universalists (New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973), pp. ix-13

[b]Tapp, Religion Among The Unitarian Universalists, pp. 19-39.

[c]Unitarian Universalist Association, Report of the Committee on Goals (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1967), p. 14

[d]Committee on Liberal Religious Thought and Dialogue, Rethinking The Goals Report (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, nd), p. 4. The committee contended that a religious liberalism devoted to human well-being must feel itself an integral part of the whole human race, that no religion will be responsive to human need today that does not address itself to all sorts and conditions of men.

[e]Unitarian Universalist Association, Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study by the UUA Media Feasibility Study Committee (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1980), p. 1.

[f]Unitarian Universalist Association, Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study by the UUA Media Feasibility Study Committee, p. 71

[g]Unitarian Universalist Association, Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study by the UUA Media Feasibility Study Committee, p. 27.

[h]Unitarian Universalist Association, Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study by the UUA Media Feasibility Study Committee, p. 27.

Values Inventory

Interest in discovering Unitarian Universalist values developed after 1968, when Milton Roheach conducted a religious values survey among Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and unbelievers who ranked eighteen terminal values (such as freedom, equality, and salvation) and eighteen instrumental values (such as ambitious, helpful, and self-controlled). Robert L'H. Miller, a Unitarian Universalist minister and religion professor at Tufts University, hypothesized that using Roheach's methodology would reveal a distinct values system among Unitarian Universalists and that these persons would not be religious if they were judged against the Christian definition of being religious that was implicit in Roheach's survey,[1]

In 1974, Miller surveyed 1,850 laypersons, 94 ministers, and 35 directors of religious education from 108 Unitarian Universalist societies. Miller discovered a constellation of values that differentiate Unitarian Universalists from other adherents and that provide a sense of homogeneous community. Miller's findings indicated unmistakable differences between the values affirmed by Unitarian Universlists and the values held by Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and unbelievers. In those values where Jews parted company with Christians, the Unitarian Universalists were consistently closer to the Jews. Roheach identified salvation as the terminal value most closely associated with being religious by Christians; but Miller concluded that salvation was a disvalue indicating no degree of being religios by eighty-two percent of the surveyed Unitarian Universalists. These Unitarian Universalists considered salvation as the least important value. According to Miller's research findings, Unitarian Universalists apparently

emphasize such qualities as loving, independent, intellectual, imaginative, and logical more than do the Catholics and Jews whose culture Unitarian Universalists share. Miller maintained that a higher priority attached by Unitarian Universalists to these values indicate a difference between Unitarian Universalists and other religious groups. Unitarian Universalists seek self-respect, wisdom, inner harmony, a world of beauty, and an exciting life; into these areas they believe that their energies can be directed most wisely.

Miller discovered that such factors as frequency of church attendance, perceived importance of religion, and economic status exert almost no influence upon Unitarian Universalist value patterns. Unitarian Universalist value patterns suggest an orientation towards competence rather than morality and emphasize personal realization, individual self-fulfillment, and self-actualization.

Another indication of common values shared among Unitarian Universalists was reflected when a revised statement of principles and purposes was developed through movement-wide deliberation and adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly during the spring, 1984.[2] The statement reads:

> We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote
> The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
> Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
> Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
> A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
> The rights of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
> The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
> Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.[3]

[1]Robert L'H. Miller, "The Religious Value System of Unitarian Universalists," Review of Religious Research XVII (3) (Spring, 1976), pp. 189-208.

[2]See David B. Parke, "GA approves new statement of Principles and Purposes," Unitarian Universalist World XV (7) (July 15, 1984), p. 1. See "Purposes, principles draft goes to GA/84 for vote," Unitarian Universalist World XV (2) (February 15, 1984), p. 1.

[3]Parke, "GA approves new statement of Principles and Purposes," p. 10. Interesting and important statistical information about the 261 returned questionnaires used during a 1983 survey is founded in the Unitarian Universalist Association, Our Unitarian Universlist Purposes and Principles (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1983).

Churches and Fellowships as Institutions

Functioning as a religious-rhetorical movement, Unitarian Universalism seldom becomes manifested through strong associations and enduring institutions. Spirited individualists preoccupied with individual intellectual freedom and congregational polity have created a constellation containing independent, autonomous churches.[1] An absence of any common creedal consensus creates an unavoidable void that seriously inhibits creating effective social structures.

Analyzing what religious authority should govern and discipline essleciastical organization, Harvard professor Wright cited the Cambridge Platform of 1648 and explained that certain church offices were eliminated when the Puritans failed to discover within the Boof of Acts of Paul's epistles any justification for diocesan bishops, archbishops, cardinals, or pope.[2] Theological hierarchies frighten most religious liberals who remember the Spanish Inquisition. However basing Unitarian Universalist rejection upon scriptural passages about ecclesiology is not simply logically inconsistent with liberal religious philosophy, but an impediment to developing viable social institutions. Wright maintains that the autonomy that characterizes independent churches profides an inadequate definition of congregationalism. Through a communion between churches, Wright indicates, a seamless web that has neither center nor circumference unites independent churches in a commonality nurtured through mutual care, consultation, admonition, participation, recommendation, relief, and succor. Attempting to articulate a liberal "doctrine of the church," Wright described the church as a covenanted body containing religiously concerned men and women; explained

that church leadership must be chosen by the members; and emphasized that a church in the liberal religious tradition exists interdependently with neighboring congregations.[3]

Minister Kellaway maintains that Unitarian Universalist societies are both gemeinschaft and a gesellschaft.[4] A gemeinschaft is a small, compact human community united by shared experience and personal loyalties; where individuals sustain their spontaneous commitment to continue that community; and where the members are known intimately and assume responsibility for the members. A gesellschaft is an organized institution with a formal structure and specific rules that establish proceedures and govern relationships. Unitarian Universalists are characterized by neither a common theological-philosophical consensus nor a common institutional commitment, but a reciprocity that Kellaway described:

> I believe that the center of our religion is the discovering, creating, sustaining and celebrating of relationships. With ourselves and one another, of course. That's community. But with time and history, space and nature, the creative energy at the center of all existing things, and with the future. What do we believe? Others become confused and we get frustrated because our religion is not a set of answers but a way of being. Our religion exists with the fulfilling of the relationships. 5

Acknowlegding a difference between soaring idealistic aspirations and concrete practical realities about church institutions, Wright expressed a keen perception:

> The predicament of liberal religion today arises in no small measure from its success in accommodating itself in earlier generations to the spirit of that age....
>
> Liberal religion articulated a value system that derived its strength from the social arrangements made possible by the discovery of the exploitable resources of the New World. But those resources were not limitless. The infinity of the private individual was plausible enough on the shores of Walden Pond, when there was no one closer than Concord Village a mile away; it is hollow rhetoric on the streets of Calcutta or in the barrios of Caracas....

> We have not named churches for Bellows, who believed that churches are important; we name them for Emerson, who thought them superflous....
>
> What is now required of religious liberals if they are to play a significant role in shaping the new age?...First of all, the heirs of the liberal tradition will have to reemphasize the religious community as something requiring both commitment and discipline. This will require the shaping of a doctrine of the Church more adequate than Emerson's talking club of individualists. It means a rejection of the Jeffersonian concept of religion as a purely private concern; it means no more of the Emersonian declaration that walking alone in grove or glen, however pleasant, is an adequate substitute for religious fellowship. 6

Wright insists that worship must be rediscovered as a corporate act in which the liturgical preferences held individually by members can never be completely accommodated; that narcissism that taints the human potential movement be rejected with a recognition that being human requires not withdrawal inward but relating with others; and that individualism should be used not to supply a positive sanction for the creative thrust of an expanding society but as a critical principle when the locus of constructive power has gone elsewhere.

[1]The New England Transcendentalist controversy provides a concrete example indicating how spirited individualists fail to create enduring institutions. Perhaps one reason why Transcendentalism as a rhetorical-communicative movement failed to reach a mass audience was because these New Englanders failed to establish a viable vehicle for the proclamation of their philosophy. See William R. Hutchison, The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 188-189. Especially helpful is Irving Jacob Rein, "The New England Transcendentalists: Rhetoric of Paradox" (unpublished dissertation, University of Pittsburg, 1966), p. 28.

[2]Conrad Wright, "A Doctrine of the Church for Liberals," a paper presented at the annual retreat of the Massachusetts Bay Unitarian Universalist ministers, Danvers, Massachusetts, March 22, 1983.

[3]See "Covenant is key to church, says Wright," Unitarian Universalist World XIV (August 15, 1983), pp. 1-4.

[4]Richard A. Kellaway, "Keepers of the Flame - Is Unitarian Universalism a Religion?" Church of the Larger Fellowship News Bulletin (June, 1983), pp. 3-5.

[5]Kellaway, "Keepers of the Flame - Is Unitarian Universalism a Religion," p. 5.

[6]Conrad Wright, "Individualism in Historical Perspective," Kairos XX (Autumn, 1980), p. 15.

Preaching

Within Unitarian Universalist societies, preaching provides a method for communicating shared religious perspectives that frequently are viable alternatives to the conventional concepts espoused through traditional, orthodox churches and synagogues. Inspiration, information, and imperatives stem from presenting thoughtful reflections upon the essential human values that Unitarian Universalists cherish. "We are going to witness," minister Harrington contended, "the collapse of the transcendent God of yesterday into an immanental, naturalistic God, an incarnated God that is some how an integral part of the great evolutionary thrust of universal life."[1] Moving beyong the "death of God" controversy, contemporary liberal clergy occasionally preach sermon series explaining general Unitarian Universalists beliefs about God, man, the scriptures, the world religions, salvation, community, prayer, worship, and immortality. These series constitute systematic theologies that reflect a persistent effort to formulate adequate religious affirmations.

Preaching is employed within worship services to nurture human growth and spirituality by describing genuine religion as a distinctive qualitative dimension pervading human experience. Ministers serve, as Southerland suggested,

> that men and women might live more satisfyingly and more adequately, that their humaneness might flower, that in the midst of failure that might be redeemed, and in the midst of tragedy they might recover, and that human society might be made to reflect and reenforce the glory that should be man's. 2

Mendelsohn told his Chicago congregation:

> But the only meaningful sense of the word ministry is that which speaks of the human fraternity of the brutal, the tender, the cordial and the savage, all at once, and as vast as life itself. He who does not

> share the deepest levels of passion and compassion with his fellow men will never know what it means to minister....If we truly love the world, so that we can dare to defy it, we will have to get much closer to it than any phony worldliness permits. We will have to immerse ourselves in its violence, tenderness, arrogance and humility, taste its bitterest cups, and open our hearts to its most painful conflicts and tensions. 3

Preaching becomes a method for nurturing ethical and humane living by emphasizing and encouraging reverence for life. Discussing suicide during a sermon, Raible maintained that "human life cannot be truthfully lived in the dark shadows of our self-blame over how we failed other individuals."[4] In a provocative sermon about adultery, Raible stated:

> I cannot see how it is either helpful or truthful to say to an adulterer, "You're sick!" I cannot believe that all infidelity rests on some kind of neurosis, which must be treated like alcoholism. Nor can I believe in any pre-ordained law of God, which holds marriage to bw an inviolate sacrament, solely monogamous, and continuously faithful....
>
> Outside a limited sphere where society has a justifiable interest, I strongly hold that consenting arrangements between adults are not fit matters for law or even for the luxury of vehement judgment by others. 5

Raibles stance on contemporary social questions seem informed by essential human values. In a sermon about abortion he asserted in 1963 that "the gift of existence is all that we can count upon for our meaning in this universe."[6] On another occasion Raible remarked:

> We hold that each and every human being must be considered a creature of dignity, worthy of respect, and precious in himself. When we strive to reach another at this level of encounter, we not only give richly; we also enhance anew the courage, the meaning, and the value of our own lives. 7

Further preaching provides a centering focus for emphasizing the significant and eliminating the unimportant, for encouraging the enduring and subordinating the transcient. Pittsburg minister Beattie asked during a sermon:

> What could be a basis for a universal, elemental, inward ethic? Reverence for life. The essential reality in human life, in all life, is the 'will to live.' And the basis for ethical living, according to Schweitzer, is to be found in the realization that 'I am a being who wills to live among other beings who will to live' or reverence for life.8

Preaching from the pulpit of All Souls Church in New York City, Church admonished:

> We have been given the knowledge of Good and Evil. If like Faust, we continue to use that knowledge for selfish, short-sided and narrow purposes our hubris will surely lead to a nemesis of ultimate proportions. However, if, like Prometheus, we give of ourselves that others may have heat and light, then the fires we are empowered to kindle will burn to bless and keep our world like beacons of hope guiding travellers through a long and dark night. 9

Rankin told an indepent, liberal congregation in Michigan: "Those afraid of reality, who flee to the safety of discredited religions, are courting the ultimate disaster."[10]

Within Unitarian Universalist societies, preaching provides not merely a method for transmiting verifiable information but to encourage individual freedom of thought and expression in a continuous seeking and constant searching. Recognizing that traditional concepts are often antiquated and inadequate, ministers inspire hearers to discover new insights at the frontiers of knowledge. Bradley summarized the idealism that sustained his sixty-five years of ministry at the Peoples Church of Chicago:

> I have always felt during my ministry that the sum total of religious truth could not be expressed within the area of a definite creed; that there was no human mind sufficiently elastic in its comprehension of divine truth to incorporate all there is of divine truth within a creed; that there was no organization on earth which could be sufficiently devoid of those appurteanances which were human and materialistic, to possibly stand as the whole of Christian truth. 11

Strongly intellectual and championing the "free mind," Howlett described a humality that should characterize liberal religion:

> The heart of religion is not knowledge supposedly revealed from on high. It is the search for knowledge discoverable on earth. Religion is not a confortable certainty. It is an uncomfortable and continuous process of learning....
>
> At the last, who can with authority probe the depths of the reality? Who shall say whence comes whatever understanding we may achieve? Who can say how valid it really is? Here we confront the mystery from which all religion takes its rise. Here, like all religious people, we come face to face with the Reality we know we shall never fully comprehend. Here, like all religious people, we fall silent before the wonder to which men long ago gave the name of God. 12

Extensive reading and sustained observation yield a conclusion that Unitarian Universalist preaching encourages living courageously within the existential here-and-now; emphasizes human personality as a supreme good; and presents pertinent ethical and moral questions. Discussing contemporary social problems and historic events provides an opportunity to identify problems, analyze their aspects, and sometimes present helpful solutions. Sermons frequently reflect situational ethics, pragmatic human values, and scientific world-views. In a sermon about homosexuality presented in 1963, Rable questioned:

> Do we, particularly men, fear for our masculine attributes so much that we cannot stand the invert? Do we fear the recall of past moments when we momentarily engaged or could have engaged in such practice ourselves that we must constantly force down the memories? Do we fear the recognition in the self that everything human we understand only too well, too well? 13

Finally, preaching encourages aesthetic appreciation and worshipful contemplation. Recognizing preaching as an artistic, imaginative, and creative art form, Argow preached an exceptionally beautiful sermon praising "that lovely, dusky maiden who after sundown so softly walks the earth with stardust in her hair la belle Nuit."[14] Employing a special aesthetic appreciation, a skillful preacher can engage the "eternal questions" and confront ultimate human concerns.

[1]Donald Szantho Harrington, "New God Or No God," a sermon preached at the Community Church of New York, January 8, 1967, p. 13. On another occasion Harrington stated that "the new concept of God is going to have to be secular. It's going to have to have a secular focus." See Donald Szantho Harrington, "What Happened To 'The Death of God?'," a sermon delivered at the Community Church of New York, March 1, 1970, p. 9.

[2]Malcolm R. Sutherland, a commencement convocation address delivered at Meadville/Lombard Theological School, Chicago, June 11, 1972, p. 2.

[3]Jack Mendelsohn, "What The Ministry Means To Me," a sermon preached at the First Unitarian Church of Chicago, September 14, 1969, p. 3.

[4]Peter Raible, "Suicide," a sermon preached at University Unitarian Church, Seattle, 1963, p. 6.

[5]Peter Raible, "Adultery," a sermon preached at University Unitarian Church, Seattle, 1963, p. 9.

[6]Peter Raible, "Abortion," a sermon preached at University Unitarian Church, Seattle, 1963, p. 2.

[7]Raible, "Suicide," p. 8.

[8]Paul H. Beattie, "Albert Schweitzer: His Ethics," a sermon presented at the First Unitarian Church, Pittsburgh, October 9, 1983, p. 6.

[9]F. Forrester Church, "Beyond Nemesis," a sermon preached at All Souls Church, Unitarian, New York City, December 1982, p. 5. This sermon was published in Religious Humanism XVII (3) (Summer, 1983), pp. 134-138.

[10]David O. Rankin, "Astrology for Skeptics," a sermon delivered at Fountain Street Church, Grand Rapids, May 6, 1984, p. 7.

[11]Preston Bradley, "That Impossible Church," The Liberalist XLVIII (April 1972), p. 5.

[12]Duncan Howlett, "Secular Religion in a Post-Christian Age," a sermon preached at All Souls Church, Washington, DC, April 23, 1972, p. 10.

[13]Peter Raible, "Homosexuality," a sermon preached at University Unitarian Church, Seattle, 1963, p. 9.

[14]Waldemar Argow, "Nocturne: A Sermon in Praise of Night," an undated sermon preached at the First Unitarian Church, Toledo, and published in the Toledo Unitarian Pulpit, VII, p. 1.

Language and Communication

Unitarian Universalists appreciate and acknowledge how linguists are distinguishing the metaphysical and ethical from the philosophical dimensions of language. Somewhere between mathematical equations and poetry evoked by mysticism, can religious language express the inexpressable and communicate the incommunicatable? Does genuine religious communication commence when symbols recede in defference to presence, when what a person "means" resists confinement within capsulized and convenient conceptions about Ultimate Reality? Does "renewing the word" through modernized language instantly intelligible to contemporary worshippers entail separating persons from the world's finest literature, ignoring the most profound philosophical writings, or abandoning the most elegant idiom? Recognizing that silence can become sacramental and that wordlessness can constitute the highest eloquence, how can one name a Nameless One? Minister Wolf admonished:

> Ours should be to enrich, to discover, to celebrate, with a fulness made possible by our privileged freedom of expression. Through the sensitive use of traditional language, we can restore men and women to the deeps of experience, the resonance of long generations of search and discovery, the heritage of poets, seers and prophets. Revivifying the language can help to overcome the estrangements of men and women from themselves and others, for to discard language, much less to attempt a new language that can speak to the profoundest of life's experiences, is futile; it only rends, it does not heal, and it does not inspire. 1

Even when employing revivified language, an individual and a community experience difficulties attempting to symbolize the infinite within the finite, the transcendent within the imminent, the eternal within the transcient.[2]

[1]John Wolf, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of Religious Langauage ed. Doris Hunter (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, undated), pp. 10-11.

[2]See Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 3, 12-13. A classic source is Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), pp. 36, 48-50, 217.

Communicative Symbols

Religious communities nurture identity, commitment, and cohesion by employing symbol-systems that evoke shared meanings. No single official symbol represents Unitarian Universalism; instead, each society remains autonomous and may select any symbol that serves the congregation purposefully.

When the Unitarian Service Committee was established in 1939, the Executive Director, Dr. Charles R. Joy, asked Hans Deutsch, an Austrian refugee-artist, to design an appropriate emblem representing the Committee.[1] Deutsch constructed a flaming chalice, containing readily recognizable features that could be interpreted variously according to different observers' diverse cultural-religious backgrounds. Within several communities, some Unitarian Universalists regard the flaming chalice as a "sacred symbol" that dramatizes cohesiveness by suggesting a corporate sharing that happens when adherents share the contents from a common container. Some suggest that the flame signifies transcendence, indicates triumphant truth, and presents a silent invitation to share religious fellowship. For Unitarian Universalists who are Christians, the flame hovering above the chalice might be interpreted as completing a cross. An all-encompassing circle surrounding the flaming chalice indicates that the earth and all inhabitants are one. In the 1940s, a group of Universalist ministers, wishing to emphasize a more universal philosophy and to demonstrate that no single symbol or expression serves the universal spirit exclusively, used an off-center cross and a circle. Numerous Unitarian Universalist societies have adopted the flaming chalice surrounded with two coinciding circles representing the merger of Unitarianism and Universalism.

Numerous Unitarian Universalists maintain that all expressions of faith can be placed within a circle.

[1]See John R. B. Szala, The Flaming Chalice (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1977).

Sacraments as Communicative Acts

Within Unitarian Universalist religious practices, "sacraments" are communicative acts that mark special moments. Sacraments either disclose the sacred within the secular or dispel an arbitrary dichotemy separating these supposed polarities. Sacraments dramatize unique moments that "reiterate the intent to invite the flow of personal authority and power from person to person, to attest to pledges unspoken, and to rejoice in life affirmed."[1] Sacraments evoke meanings during like-marking transitions and times-of-passage, occur when life's inexpressible depts become disclosed, and celebrate an indescribable beauty that develops when astounding mystery and simple holiness pervade everyday experiences. Alan Seaburg explained:

> Individual moments come often and with intense beauty: your child's first gurgle of happiness, a kiss exchanged in passion, warm rolls and very hot coffee, the writing of a poem, the calmness of solitude. Such moments are shouts of sweetness. While personal for each, they belong to us all....
>
> Then there are moments to be shared with the community. Some of these are seasonal and repeat themselves endlessly through the generations of time. They can be called Easter and Christmas, they can be called festivals - Spring, Harvest, Midwinter. They are the calendar by which we arrange human life. When they occur we gather to sing, to touch, to rejoice. Then there are four great moments of life: birth, coming-of-age, marriage or love, and death. These are the most sacred moments of all. They tie us one to another and in recognition of this fact we celebrate them with our family and friends. 2

Minister Wells stated:

> A sacrament can be traversing the bridge at Golden Gate, walking at Gettysburg, viewing earth from the Canadian Rockies, strolling near crashing waves on sunlit coasts, or in the silence of sequoias; wading the brook in Minnesota where the Father of Waters begins its journey to the Gulf....

> Sacraments hover around the essentials of life, in such things as sexual intercourse and other deep reunions of flesh and spirit, in meals together, a last supper, at an altar rail with bread and wine or a picnic with strawberries and milk. Sacraments occur when the depth of life is disclosed.3

Because clergy and laypersons are not required to preserve conventional rituals and practice traditional litanies, these religious practioners are not circumscribed with meaningless ritualistic formalities but enjoy a creative freedom to construct purposeful celebrations.

Sometimes societies conduct innovative and imaginative "flower" and "apple" communion services.

A psychologically pleasing and aesthetically beautiful "flower communion service" was developed by Dr. Norbert F. Capek, minister serving the Unitarian Church in Prague, Czechoslavakia, when Capek returned to his homeland in 1921 following a voluntary exile in the United States.[4] Capek attracted dissatisfied Catholics, Protestants, and Jews who were displeased with such conventional institutions as the Czechosloval National Church and who subsequently established the Liberal Religious Fellowship. The first flower communion service was conducted on June 4, 1923; worshippers who participated in Capek's congregation were invited to bring to the worship service flowers that were collected in a single vase and subsequently distributed when the congregation departed following worship service. A vase containging various flowers symbolized the diverse individuals who composed the congregation, and the collected bouquet symbolized the unity or cohesion of the collected community. Everyone's spiritual sensitivity became enriched with an impressive service during which participants created a common beauty and share a special loveliness. The First Parish (Unitarian) in Cambridge, Massachusetts,

observed the flower communion service in 1940, and the practive was adopted by the Second Universalist Church in South Weymouth, Massachusetts, and the First Unitarian Church in Portland, Oregon.

A colorful "apple communion service" was constructed and conducted by the Reverend Alexander Meek, Jr. at the First Unitarian Universalist Church in Rochester, Minnesota. The service was planned to demonstrate or dramatize an important principle that the ritual celebrated:

> Nature is so various and the universe itself so vast that if you are going to commune with it, you must be selective and do it with something simple and near at hand....
>
> An apple is a small thing, God knows, and a fragile thing. But it is related directly to the turning of the stars, the thawing of the earth, the warming of the soil, the warm, wet rains of nature's realm, the mystery of germination in the earth, just the right amount of sun, even this kiss of the bee. O, yes, the apple is woven so delicately, so mysteriously, so miraculously into the whole of nature's fragile web of life: clouds and sunshine, leaves and grass. Holy is this earth where unamazed we dwell! The miracles of earth and seasons that sustain us all are love-worn toys, a magic gone because we do not see the solitude of each and the unity of all! 5

[1]Berna Derby, ed. Unitarian Universalist Views of the Sacraments (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1976), p. 4.

[2]Alan Seaburg, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of the Sacraments, p. 9.

[3]Clark D. Wells, Unitarian Universalist Views of the Sacraments, p. 6.

[4]Reginald Zottoli, The Flower Communion Service (Boston: Worship Arts Clearing House, Division of Education, Department of Ministerial and Congregational Service, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1980).

[5]Alexander Meek, Jr., An Apple Communion Service (Boston: Worship Arts Clearing House, Division of Education, Department of Ministerial and Congregational Service, Unitarian Universalist Association, undated).

Prayer as Communication

Whenever Unitarian Universalists pray, some caustic critics contend, they address their prayers almost anonymously: To whom it may concern. According to the 1979 media survey, thirty-eight percent of all Unitarian Universalists and forty percent of the new members described the function of prayer as "communion with inner self." Forty percent of all the respondents and thirty-four percent of the new members described the function as meditation. Sixteen percent of all the members and twenty percent of the new adherents called prayer, "Communion with God." Fourteen percent of all these Unitarian Universalists and sixteen percent of the new members responded: "I do not find the term useful." Eleven percent of all and twelve percent of the new considered the function of prayer as "intercession with others." Eight percent of all and twelve percent of the new described the function as "autosuggestion." Twenty-nine percent of all Unitarian Universalists and thirty-one percent of the new members reported, "I do not pray."

Thus forty-three percent of all Unitarian Universalists and forty-eight percent of the new members either "do not pray" or "do not find the term useful." An intrapersonal communication orientation might be indicated when eighty-six percent of all members and new adherents combined describe the function of prayer as communion with inner self, meditation, and autosuggestion. Intercession received minor consideration: nineteen percent of all Unitarian Universalists and twenty-eight percent of the new members described the function of prayer as either "intercession for others" or "petition for self." Nineteen percent of

all and twenty percent of the new identified a function of prayer as communion with God.

Prayer constitutes a natural phenomenon. Using preaching to examine and explain prayer, Church identified three types of prayers: prayers to heal one's internal brokenness, prayer to unite or reconcile oneself with another, and prayer that accepts or affirms the creation:

> The purpose of prayer is to help us heal our brokenness....
> It is a way of giving yourself a chance to focus your mind, to gather your strength, to ready yourself for the miracle of another day...
> Each is a way of putting all of the parts in perspective of the whole. One asks nothing, in such a prayer, of oneself or for another. One simply acknowledges the wonder and mystery of life, the absolutely unfathomable gift of being itself. This, finally, is the largest and most important prayer of all. It is a way of letting go and just for a moment, a blessed moment, being swept away. Without demand, beyond regret, one yields. One says yes to life, to every part of it. And there is power in this. Past and future disappear. The present becomes one with eternity. All division, all brokenness, is, in that eternity, overcome. 1

Prayer happens naturally, amid everyday experiences, as Chruch explained:

> Sometimes it happens in the strangest places. There you are at the end of a checkout line or forty minutes from departure or waiting for a free dryer. It's irritating, but what's to be done?... Every once in a while this happens to me. Unconsciously, I begin emptying myself of worries, preoccupations, distractions, and then, quite unexpectedly, I find myself being filled with what people call the spirit of God. 2

Minister Robbins gave a specific example:

> A little girl, seeing the first yellow dandelion on the spring lawn, ran to it, plucked it, held it over her head like a parasol and pirouetted in a ballet of irrepressible happiness for the wholly unearned gift of life, of beauty, of wonderful goodness. It was a vision of the best of prayers, a prayer of grace, of joy, of thanksgiving. 3

[1]F. Forrester Church, "The Power of Prayer," a sermon preached at the Unitarian Church of All Souls, New York City, March, 1982, pp. 2, 4-5.

[2]F. Forrester Church, "An Invitation to Prayer," a sermon preached at the Unitarian Church of All Souls, New York City, November, 1982, p. 1.

[3]Wallace W. Robbins, "The Humanity of Prayer" Church of the Larger Fellowship News Bulletin (October, 1975), p. 5.

Worship as Communication

Within their societies, Unitarian Universalists share numerous activities. These religious liberals enjoy fellowship, develop ministerial and lay leadership, nurture personal self-realization, provide religious education, construct adult programs, initiate social action, and observe worship services. Interestingly, only twenty-nine percent of the Unitarian Universalists in larger societies and thirty-one percent of the Unitarian Universalists in societies without ministers ranked public worship as "very important."[1] Twenty-seven percent of all Unitarian Universalists and twenty-five percent of the new members ranked public worship as "very important."[2]

Worship serves several fundamental human needs. The media survey asked respondents to indicate the importance of such factors as intellectual stimulation, fellowship, personal reflection, celebrating common values, group participation, music, and motivation to serve others. Intellectual stimulation emerged as the most important when seventy-five percent of all members and seventy-eight percent of the new Unitarian Universalists ranked that factor as "very important."[3] Intellectual stimulation was rated "very important" by eighty-two percent of all respondents who were between fifty and sixty years of age; seventy-nine percent living in the western United States; and seventy-seven perecnt in societies without ministers.[4] Some critics claim that the question remains unanswered: What function does public worship perform in the religious experience of Unitarian Universalists?

Although few apparently lead "active prayer lives" or consider worship as

"a meaningful experience," several theorists within the movement have written significant statements explaining worship for religious liberals.

Henry Nelson Wieman, a distinguished process theologian at the University of Chicago Divinity School, described God as the integrative process working within the universe' explained love as the integrative principle functioning at the human dimension; and called worship a clarifying reflection upon one's functioning within this progressively integrating process through cultivated mental attitudes that are serious, sincere, and systematic.[5]

Von Ogden Vogt, a former minister who served the First Unitarian Society in Chicago, called worship "celebration of life" when he explained that worship constitutes an aesthetic experience mediated through an artistic form. Vogt stated that worship commences with a commanding vision or compelling idea; the focus moves inward as a worshipper relates oneself to that perspective; the individual becomes challenged and empowered; and then the worshipper responds with dedication and commitment.[6] Vogt's concept was expressed through a sequence: attention-vision, humility, exaltation, illumination, and dedication. Another model based upon Vogt's concept contains four stages: centering, embracing limitations, declaring the possibilities, and community building.

Additional schemes provide viable alternatives for Unitarian Universalist congregations. A theory about psychotherapeutic change adapted to Vogt's model might use a four-fold sequence: awareness of an immediate issue; accepting one's relationship with the issue; application of the issue through living experience; and returning to the self with renewed sensations about wholeness. Considering worship as a pilgrimage from one's concerns, through group exploration, and a

journey's ending where the individual becomes alone again, someone might structure worship around a four-fold sequence: approach-call, connection-community, exploration, and return-thanksgiving. Employing writings that describe mystical experience, a worship leader might use another scheme: purgation, illumination, and union.[7] There is no reason why rational and reasonable Unitarian Universalists could not adapt Monroe's motivated sequence to the worship service and utilize a sequencial development: attention, need, satisfaction, visualization, and action.[8]

Numerous Unitarian Universalists who affirm diverse religious convictions participate in worship services and find their common celebration efficacious. Those who embrace a Christian persuasion learn from experience that the "spirit of Jesus surely can be brought into a person's heart or mind at any time, in any place. It does not require a symbolic act."[9] No individual's integrity becomes compromised in a common attempt to "destroy the lesser gods that claim the loyalties of men and betray the fellowship of man."[10] Within worship, different individuals can believe that God is "not a proposition to be proved but a reality to be experienced,"[11] "the ultimate object of our faith,"[12] "the eternal stillness beneath change and the creative energy of the cosmic process,"[13] "an impersonal process; which is that part of the total process that has operated and continues to operate so as to result in goodness,"[17] a who or which is discovered "not in the starry heavens nor in the depths of the material earth, but within the human spirit itself."[15] Stimulating diversity without an inevitable conflict can emerge within a pluralistic fellowship or

church where one individual believes, "Christianity is a religion whose adherents subscribe to an essential core of doctrine which no Unitarian Universalist of my acquantance would accept."[16] Even when another individual within the same congregation might contend, "All of us in the liberal church are basically Christian."[17] Neiter unanimity nor consensus about religious conclusions is required in attributing worth to some source of significance. Gold realized:

> Worship - the attributing of worth - is an inner response. It is an attitude of mind, a posture of the total personality....
> And the ultimate goal ought to be the celebration of life's wonder and potential in such a way that all would be stimulated to pursue life's highest aspirations with new vigor and new hope. 18

Most Unitarian Universalists would agree that meaningful religion "must grow out of a immediate and fresh personal experience of the deep realities of life."[19] Worship nurtures a sharp, clear consciousness of spiritual experience.

[1]Unitarian Universalist Association, Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study by the UUA Media Feasibility Study Committee, p. 19.

[2]Unitarian Universalist Association, Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study by the UUA Media Feasibility Study Committee, p. 19.

[3]Unitarian Universalist Association, Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study by the UUA Media Feasibility Study Committee, p. 20.

[4]Unitarian Universalist Association, Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study by the UUA Media Feasibility Study Committee, p. 20.

[5]See Henry N. Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926); Normative Psychology of Religion (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1935); The Source of Human Good (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946); Man's Ultimate Commitment (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958); Religious Inquiry: Some Explorations (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); and Seeking a Faith for a New Age (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1975).
Helpful is John A. Boyer and William S. Minor, eds. Creative Interchange (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982).

[6]Von Ogden Vogt, Art and Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). See Willard Sperry, Reality in Worship (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925).

[7]See Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1961); William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: The New American Library, 1958); Rufus M. Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (London: Macmillan and Company, 1923); Rufus M. Jones, New Studies in Mystical Religion (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928); and Abraham Maslow, Religion, Values, and Peak Experiences (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964).
See Arthur Foote, Can I Be A Mystic and Unitarian Universalist (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979).

[8]Douglas Ehninger, Alan H. Monroe, and Bruce Gronbeck, Principles and Types of Speech Communication (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1978). See John Dewey, How We Think (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1910).

[9]Robert A. Storer, A Unitarian Universalist Views The Sacraments (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, undated), p. 11.

[10]Charles M. Styron, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of Church ed. Mrs. Frederick Lipp (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, undated), p. 4.

[11]Arthur Foote, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of God ed. Bradock L. Lovely (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1967), p. 4.

[12]George K. Beach, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of God, p. 2.

[13]Richard A. Kellaway, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of God, p. 7.

[14]John G. MacKinnon, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of God, p. 9.

[15]Harry C. Meserve, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of God, p. 11.

[16]Ralph C. Dailey, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of Christianity ed. Richard A Kellaway (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1967), p. 4.

[17]John E. Trowbridge, statement, Unitarian Universalist Views of Christianity, p. 5.

[18]William Gold, Worship In Liberal Religion (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1966), pp. 3-6.

[19]Paul W. Sawyer, "At The Heart of All Religion," The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide ed. Harry E. Scholefield (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1967), p. 21.

Music as Communication

Congregational singing and worship service litanies in Unitarian Universalist churches and fellowships are facilitated with a refreshing, uplifting, contemporary hymnal published in 1964, Hymns for the Celebration of Life.[1] This sophisticated collection contains opening and closing words appropriate for worship services; common prayers and affirmations that reflect a contemporary universal humanism; and multiple comprehensive indexes that assist usage by congregations. A secular emphasis seems evident in numerous selections about celebration and praise, transience and continuous life, seasons and events, the church of the free spirit, and humankind's world-wide cultural-religious heritage. An implicit theology expressed inevitably through the hymnal indicates an appreciation for diverse beliefs, various perspectives, and different cultural contexts. Hymns for the Celebration of Life affirms that "truth" is discovered continuously in numerous traditions and communities; that successive generations must express a relevant faith anew through contemporary artistic creations such as music and literature; and that common worship should never suppress individual freedom of conscience. Among the authors whose writings are included are Samuel Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Frederick Lucian Hosmer, William Channing Gannett, Kenneth L. Patton, and Rabindranath Tagore. Recognizing a need for a new hymnal containing non-sexist language, encouraging continuity through passing generations, and presenting contemporary literature suggesting new forms of religious faith, editor Parke said:

> A hymnal is the common possession of all the members of a religious community, including those dead and unborn. It is an expression of the highest aspirations, sung and spoken, of a gathered people in a given historical moment. 2

[1]Unitarian Universalist Association, Hymns for the Celebration of Life (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1964).

[2]David B. Parke, "A new hymnal," Unitarian Universalist World XV (10) (October 15, 1984), p. 6.

Mass Media Communication

The 1979 survey provides specific findings about Unitarian Universalist mass-media communicative behavior. On an average, all Unitarian Universalists spend 41.5 hours each week reading, watching television, and listening to the radio. New members devote 40 hours each week to these communicative activities. All Unitarian Universalists who responded during the survey averaged six hours a week reading books, five hours reading newspapers, and four hours reading magazines. New members average five hours reading books, four hours reading newspapers, and three hours reading magazines. Almost eighty percent of all Unitarian Universalists and nearly seventy percent of the new members read a newspaper daily. Although no clear preference for magazines emerged, three were mentioned frequently: Time, National Geographic, and Newsweek. All Unitarian Universalists spend about twelve hours a week watching television, while new members spend approximately ten hours. All as well as the new Unitarian Universalists prefer documentaries, news programs, news commentary programs, and Public Broadcasting Corporation Programs. Unitarian Universalists spend more time listening to the radio, rather than using the other mass media. All Unitarian Universalists average thirteen hours each week listening to the radio, while the new members average eighteen hours each week. Unitarian Universalists under thirty-five years of age clearly prefer listening to the radio, while eleven percent of the new adherents reported that they do not watch television.

Conclusions

As a contemporary religious-rhetorical movement and distinctive persuasion, Unitarian Universalism nurtures an evolving, enriching religious perspective that addresses humanity's existential experience, encourages strong interpersonal relationships, and requires effective communication. "We are recognizing anew," former UUA President Greeley said, "how necessary it is that a continual dialogue go on within our own household of faith."[1] Another minister, Steve Fritchman, wrote:

> I am persuaded that the encouragement of responsible dialogue is the basic goal of our religion, a dialogue which assists us and our congregations to discover meaning and a program for man while he is yet alive on this fertile, glorious earth. 2

As a sustained life-of-dialogue, Unitarian Universalism presents a description of genuine religion as a qualitative dimension pervading human experience and existence that requires symbolic expression; contains a recognization that religious response requires symbolization although differences characterize the poetic-emotive language and the objective-scientific language; demonstrates that instramental music and the performing arts provide additional languages that enrich religious communication and celebration, although the deepest human communication remains non-verbal and almost invariably incomplete. Sensitivity toward humanity's unfathomed nature, awe-stricken within a mysterious, star-studded universe where humans persistently seek meaning and purpose, a diserous to live joyously and courageously even amid impending disaster and tragedy, persons embracing Unitarian Universalism acknowledge an imperative to communicate that minister Howlett described:

> Beholding such loveliness, feeling more than understanding its meaning, like the inquirer who stands before unfolding truth, you would speak, but no words come, for no words can serve your purpose. Then a Name rises to your lips, an ancient name, a name as old as man. And so you speak the Name, not knowing quite what you have said or why you have said it. But you have known what man has always known when he has come close to the infinite and the eternal - that he must speak of it. 3

[1]Greeley, Guide, pp. 48-49.

[2]Fritchman, Politics and The Pulpit, p. 6.

[3]Duncan Howlett, The Fourth American Faith (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 214.